

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE**BALAK****Haftarah: Michah 5:6-6:8****JUNE 29-30, 2018 17 TAMUZ 5778****Happy Birthday Mariyah****DEDICATION: In memory of Sarah bat Esther - Sarah Levy A"H**

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This coming Sunday, July 1, 2018, is a day of public fasting (רוביץ תינעת) that commemorates the 17th of Tammuz. On that day we also inaugurated a period of 3 weeks, until the 9th of the month of Ab, dedicated to keeping some elements of mourning for the destruction of our Bet haMiqdash (Temple of Jerusalem) and for other tragedies suffered by the Jewish people. Five tragedies happened to the Jewish people on 17 Tammuz.

- 1. The Tablets of the Law were destroyed.**
- 2. An idol was placed in the Sanctuary of the Bet HaMiqdash.**
- 3. The daily sacrificial offering was interrupted.**
- 4. Apostomus publicly burned a Sefer Tora.**
- 5. The walls of the city of Jerusalem were destroyed.**

Courtesy Rabbi Y Bitton

EDITORS NOTES

This Shabbat is the 17th Of Tamuz. We push the fast to Sunday and begin the three weeks culminating in Tisha Be'Av. Although we mourn the destruction of the Temple every day of the year, our grieving takes on a different dimension during this period. And any time we recall the destruction, we look forward to the end of exile and the coming of the Mashiach. Many of our teachers agree that the only reference to Mashiach or at least the most descriptive one is to be found this week in the closing words of Bilaam.

We have discussed previously that Bilaam soul shared its root with Moses. When the Rabbis tell us, Loh Kam BeYisrael KeMoshe Od, there never rose among Israel a prophet as great as Moses, they explain that this was true among Israel, but among the nations there was Bilaam. In our teaching based on the Arizal we see Bilaam as the evil shadow of Moses. When Moses failed last week to properly use his voice at the incident of the hitting of the rock,

some power from Moses fell to his shadow. And thus the words of redemption which Moses should have spoken or perhaps actualized if all had gone correctly at the rock, fell to Bilaam to tell us. Perhaps this is why the Gemarah must inform us that Moses wrote his own book and the story of Bilaam. Isn't the story of Bilaam within the Torah? Perhaps Moses was reluctant to write about Bilaam who's power arose from Moshe's loss.

Part of the end of days scenario includes the Jewish people returning to the land from Exile. We see this in our day and for those of us who have not yet returned, we see little pushes all the time. The headline of an article I saw this morning in Commentary magazine was, "Time to Leave?" It dealt with the question that the Jews of Britain and Europe must ponder by Melanie Phillips. The article began with these words. These are alarming times for Jews in Britain and Europe. The British Labour Party is convulsed over the realization that it is riddled with anti-Semitism. Jeremy Corbyn, its leader and a friend to Hamas, has been exposed as belonging to Facebook groups hosting claims that the Jews were behind ISIS and 9/11, that the Rothschilds controlled the world's finances, and other such paranoid theories. The backwash from the exposure of these groups revealed a tsunami of anti-Jewish insults, smears, and libels by Labour supporters. Corbyn's responses, often truculent and insulting to the Jewish community, have only deepened the crisis. For more, see <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/time-to-leave/>

Another article I saw spoke of a lawmaker for a populist right-wing party in Sweden who has been accused of racism after writing on Facebook that Jews and members of the Sami minority are not Swedes.

Right here in New York, a radical 28-year-old former Bernie Sanders campaign volunteer stunned the political world by defeating longtime powerful Democratic incumbent Rep. Joe Crowley who was expected to be one of the top picks to eventually replace House Minority Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Ocasio-Cortez tweeted earlier this year that what Israel was doing at the Gaza Strip "is a massacre."

Her tweet continued, saying that she hopes her “peers have the moral courage to call it such. No state or entity is absolved of mass shootings of protesters. There is no justification. Palestinian people deserve basic human dignity, as anyone else. Democrats can’t be silent about this anymore.” From our own home comes another enemy of the Jewish nation.

Anti-Semitism is rampant on the street, in the papers and on the news, if not by what they write than certainly by what they do not write. See the article on the Washington Post below. This current idea of fake news can be sourced to this week’s perasha as well. We see in the opening words that Balak’s fear is based on what he saw happen to the Amorites. Balak’s call to arms was in his claim that, “Just as the children of Israel came in and destroyed Sichon the giant king of the Amorites and his entire nation, they would come to attack and destroy the Midianites and Moabites.” He forgets that the children of Israel begged for permission to pass through the Amorite territory offering to pay for anything they touched on their way to the land of Israel. He forgets that it was Sichon and his people who attacked Benai Yisrael. He doesn’t mention that Benai Yisrael fought a defensive war to survive and in that war won. Sounds familiar, doesn’t it, when we look at current history with the State of Israel. It all begins in the Torah.

Back to the news, lets not forget Jewish Anti-Semitism. We as usual are our own worst enemy, see the article on Taglit harassing those trying to simply fly out of the states on their way to Israel for birthright.

Rabbi Sacks writes below: “The less-good news, though, is that Anti-Semitism has returned within living memory of the Holocaust. The State of Israel remains isolated in the international political arena. It is still surrounded by enemies. And it is the only nation among the 193 making up the United Nations whose very right to exist is constantly challenged and always under threat.”

There is a message in the madness, Hashem is definitely telling us something. We have a home and we need to go back. Are we willing to hear it?

Paul McCartney sang:
Someone's knockin' at the door
Somebody's ringin' the bell
Do me a favor
Open the door and let 'em in.

And at least now, not only can we let Him in, we have a place that invites us in. We have somewhere to go

and that place is home. It’s been a long journey from the first exile 2600 years ago through the second exile 2000 years ago and wandering ever since.

....

We have all heard the story of Daniel and his interpretation of Nevuchadnessar’s dream.

The king had had a dream which greatly perturbed him. He burned with eagerness to know what it meant, but reasoned that he could be sure that an interpretation was correct only if the interpreter was able to narrate the dream itself without being told it. Since none of his masters of occult lore was able to do this, the king ordered his captain of the guard to execute all the savants of Babylon. The officer proceeded to do so, and since Daniel and his companions came under the definition of savants, they were also to be put to death. On asking the captain of the guard for the reason and receiving his answer, Daniel persuaded him to discontinue the slaughter for a few hours and promised that at the end of that time he would come up with the answer to the king’s questions. Then he and his companions prayed, and the solution was revealed to Daniel in a dream. Brought before the king, and after expressing gratitude to the Almighty and attributing his insight to Hashem, Daniel proceeded to remind the king of his dream, and provided him with a striking prediction of the future, describing the successive kingdoms that would rise to power and dominate the civilized world, including the Median-Persian, Greek and Roman empires. Daniel explained that Nebuchadnezzar’s domination of the whole world would be followed by the successive world ascendancies of three other monarchies, after which Hashem would set up a fifth monarchy that would destroy the four previous monarchies and would endure forever. On hearing this, Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with admiration for Daniel and his G-d that he appointed Daniel both supreme administrator of the whole province of Babylon and supreme prefect over all the savants of Babylon; but at Daniel’s request the supreme administrative office was divided among his three companions, while he retained only the advisory one.

We have lived through this dream. We have been exiled by Babylonia, experienced Haman under Persia, survived Hellenization under the Greeks and the long Roman exile. As we approach these three weeks, we often forget what exile means, we forget what was destroyed and don’t realize what we lost.

On Wednesday, Chantelle, Mariyah and I tried to capture a bit of our history. We spent three hours in a building on Fifth Avenue and 82nd Street where we explored those four kingdoms trying to get a taste of

each. The building is the Metropolitan Museum of Art and although the goal of Met is to present art and not teach history, history is there for us especially with the right guide. We were lucky to have with us Nachliel Selavan who has been giving tours to groups and individuals for many years. Nachliel who hails from the old city of Jerusalem teaches at Magen David Yeshivah High School, and in The Allegra Franco College in Brooklyn. He has taught at Barkai as well. It was truly an eye opening experience.

I am certainly a student of history and Chantelle and I have been members of the museum for many years although in the old days our visits were usually limited to the Metropolitan Museum Costume Institute gala. But our visit with Nachliel allowed us to see the museum through a very different perspective.

Although our tour was focused on the four kings, we took many tangents beginning with tracing Abraham's journey from Ur Kasdim to Charan and down into Canaan to Egypt and back. We traced the steps of the fleeing prophet Jonah from Israel to Tarshish and back across the fertile crescent to Ninveh. We stood in the corridor of an Assyrian throne room experiencing what the Jewish kings must have felt during the time of Sancherib. And then we began our journey in the world of Nevuchadnesar who insisted that his name be everywhere trying to imagine his world and our people in their first exile. We could see Daniel in the lion's den and hear his dream interpretation. We moved from Babylon to Shushan seeing a palace larger than we ever imagined and understanding how a party could go on for six months. We saw the drinking vessels and understood how Persia decentralized some of the government differing from their predecessors. We discussed who Achashverosh was and why the Temple was such an issue. We traveled to Macedonia with King Philip and then saw how Alexander conquered and changed the world and how that world was split after his death at such a young age. We saw his images and his coins. We saw the beauty of Yefet. We saw that which influenced us and undoubtedly influenced our ancestors leading to a civil war which culminated in Hanukkah. And then we saw how the kings of Judah hoped to relieve themselves of Greece by inviting Rome to stand by them. They rid themselves of the dog, but gave control to the lion. We met with Nero, Vespasian and Titus discussing the Talmud's stories of them. We heard how the Torah was saved by Rabbi Yochana Zakai and how the oral Torah was saved through Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi and Antoninus his friend and Caesar and we discussed who the Antoninus of the Talmud may have really been. It was truly a journey through the four kingdoms and one I will continue to explore.

We see the museum very differently and look forward to experiencing this again with other tours focusing on Egypt, Ashur and perhaps spending more time on each of the four kingdoms noted. We thank Nachliel.

If you would like to learn more about his group tours or arrange a private tour as we did, please visit torahintermedia.com. Nachliel is back in Jerusalem for the summer and perhaps you can entice him or his dad (one of the most famous tour guides in Israel) to show you around. Or make a reservation with him for the fall. It will certainly change your perspective on Jewish history.

You'll want Chantelle to join you as well as she showed us jewelry from each of the periods, century following century. She had an intimate knowledge of each of the pieces and the designs. She is sure that it was because she held these pieces before in her previous reincarnations. Truly fascinating!

Shabbat Shalom,

David

Anti-Israel Socialist Defeats Powerful Democratic NY Congressman In Primary Upset The Jewish Voice / Sarah Cavanaugh

A radical 28-year-old former Bernie Sanders campaign volunteer stunned the political world by defeating longtime powerful Democratic incumbent Rep. Joe Crowley (D-NY14th). Until last night, Crowley was expected to be one of the top picks to eventually replace House Minority Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democratic socialist from the Bronx, has unseated Joe Crowley, a 20-year congressman, in a stunning political upset that caught the attention of veteran party members and young liberals alike.

The victory, in a New York district primary election to determine who stands against the Republicans in November's midterms for a seat in Congress, immediately prompted debate about the wider ramifications for the Democrats, and whether it heralds a further move to the left.

Many on the right welcome the shift to the hard left by the Democrats, as outside of the East & West Coast, this brand of socialism which borders on communism is not exactly popular.

Ocasio-Cortez is a member of the Democratic Socialists of America and a former organizer for Bernie Sanders. She would be the youngest female member of Congress in history if she wins as expected in November.

Ocasio-Cortez ran on a left-wing platform that included a federal jobs guarantee program and abolishing Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the border patrol enforcement agency created under President George W. Bush in 2003. She advocates: free college for all, free health care for all, open borders, emptying out prisons and ran a divisive campaign based on class warfare and race baiting. Many would classify her ideological leanings as communist.

She won by a margin of 57.5 percent to 42.5 percent over Crowley in a majority minority district that included parts of Queens and the Bronx.

Observers last night were quick to point out a tweet she posted about Israel during her campaign. Replying to Qatar-based news agency Al Jazeera English, she tweeted that what Israel was doing at the Gaza Strip "is a massacre." Her tweet continued, saying that she hopes her "peers have the moral courage to call it such. No state or entity is absolved of mass shootings of protesters. There is no justification. Palestinian people deserve basic human dignity, as anyone else. Democrats can't be silent about this anymore."

In an interview earlier this month with Glenn Greenwald, a pundit with the Intercept who's best known for his National Security Agency reporting when he published top-secret material handed over to him by former contractor Edward Snowden, Ocasio-Cortez explained her position in greater detail. The Jerusalem Post said that Greenwald opened the discussion referring to "peaceful, unarmed protesters" killed on the Gaza-Israel border in the mid-May protests, although Israel and Hamas both note that 50 of the 62 killed were members of Hamas and were attempting to breach the border. "My background is as an educator, an organizer and an activist," Ocasio-Cortez said. She added that she thinks she "was primarily compelled on moral grounds, because I can only imagine if 60 people were shot and killed in Ferguson, or if 60 people were shot in killed in the West Virginia teacher strikes." The Jerusalem Post reports that she talked about her diverse congressional district, saying that many Jewish and Muslim constituents had thanked her for the stance she took on Twitter. According to the Berman Jewish Data Bank, a project of the Jewish Federations of North America, roughly 29,000 Jewish residents live in the district.

"People say in New York City this is political suicide, and so on, but I had a lot of my own constituents thanking me for taking that position," Ocasio-Cortez continued. "I think that in the same lens that I looked at it, people, I think, are separating the actions and the status of the Palestinians from the greater geopolitics of the area. I think people are starting to

just look at the humanitarian state of the Palestinian people through a humanitarian lens."

She hit Crowley hard for his ties to Wall Street, accusing him of being out of touch with his increasingly diverse district. Crowley sent a surrogate to fill in for him at a debate against Ocasio-Cortez and rarely spends time in his district. Like Sanders, she denied corporate donations and help from super PACs and 501(c)(4) dark money groups.

When the result was called, a visibly shocked Ocasio-Cortez clasped her hands to her mouth. "Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my God," she repeated. She then said: "We meet a machine with a movement, and that is what we have done today," she said, barely containing her enthusiasm. She added that "working-class Americans want a clear champion and there is nothing radical about moral clarity in 2018."

Crowley, head of the Queens county Democratic party and the fourth-ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives, had raised over \$3m for his campaign, 10 times the amount raised by Ocasio-Cortez. To say he was unprepared for this result and shocked by last night's outcome would be an understatement. One national Democratic strategist told the Guardian that "the Crowley team did not raise red flags or ask allies for help with his primary."

For The Washington Post, Jewish Blood Isn't Cheap — It's Just Not Worth the Ink avatar by Sean Durns

"If it bleeds, it leads" is an old adage describing the media's tendency to prioritize stories involving violence. But this is not the case, it seems, if it's Israelis who are doing the bleeding. And not if you're The Washington Post covering the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Beginning in late March 2018, Hamas undertook a nearly two-month-long operation dubbed the "Great Return March," in which the Gaza-based terror group sent its operatives — many of them armed — to breach Israel's sovereign border. In an attempt to create civilian casualties, terrorists were interspersed among unarmed civilians and tires were burned and mirrors used to obscure the vision of IDF snipers seeking to target Hamas terrorists.

Nonetheless, the Israeli targeting was largely successful. Of the 124 Gazans killed during the event, "more than 80%" were "terrorist operatives or affiliated with terrorist organizations," according to a June 12, 2018 analysis by the Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. Hamas itself not only admitted that many of those killed were its operatives, but also conceded that they were

“deceiving the public” by claiming that the March was one of “peaceful” resistance.

Media coverage of the Hamas-led operation, however, was uniformly awful — as CAMERA has documented. And The Washington Post was among the worst.

The Post regurgitated casualty claims by Gaza’s “Health Ministry,” but failed to inform readers that the ministry is a Hamas entity that shares the group’s goals of delegitimizing and destroying Israel. The “ministry” is not, as The Post would have readers believe, a credible source.

Worse still, the paper failed to fully detail Hamas’ role and objectives at the border, often neglecting to note that leaders of the terror group planned the operation while calling on their supporters to murder Israelis. Weeks after Hamas leaders admitted on video that many of those killed at the border were its members, The Washington Post has continued to file reports referring to the dead terrorists as “protesters” (see, for example, “Palestinians trapped in Gaza face mounting health crisis,” June 20, 2018).

Portraying Palestinian terrorists as protesters is emblematic of The Post’s tendency to minimize the threats faced by the Jewish state.

As CAMERA detailed in a June 8, 2018 oped, Gazans have been sending hundreds of kites and balloons filled with flammable material over the border, causing hundreds of fires and destroying Israeli property and livelihoods. Despite the novelty of these attacks, The Post didn’t report the mass arson until weeks after it began. The Post’s June 18, 2018 dispatch claimed that the “damage is not huge,” only to later quote an official from the Jewish National Fund who said that the damage to woodland and wildlife is “extensive.”

Similarly, a May 29 Post report seemed to question Israeli anger at Hamas for launching rockets at the country’s schoolchildren. The paper bizarrely reported, “One of the mortars in the first round of fire early Tuesday struck the yard of a kindergarten, drawing angry responses from Israeli leaders, although no children were in the preschool at the time” (emphasis added).

This description could be read as implying that the “angry response” from Israeli leaders was an overreaction. At the very least, it’s an odd way to describe a terror group’s failed attempt to murder Israeli schoolchildren.

And when The Post isn’t busy downplaying anti-Jewish violence, it’s outright ignoring it.

On June 5, Israel’s Shin Bet domestic intelligence agency announced that it had broken up a Palestinian terror cell that had planned to murder top government officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The Post failed to report the story, just as it failed to report a foiled February 2018 plot by Palestinian Islamic Jihad to assassinate Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman.

On June 18, The Jerusalem Post reported, “Twenty Hamas members from the West Bank city of Nablus who planned lethal attacks across the country — including a suicide bombing in Jerusalem — have been arrested.” The Washington Post didn’t print a word about the arrests.

Thwarted terror plots, including suicide bombings and the planned assassination of a country’s leaders, are certainly newsworthy, but apparently not if the country is Israel and the newspaper is The Washington Post.

Sean Durns is a Senior Research Analyst for CAMERA, the 65,000-member Boston-based Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America.

IfNotNow accosts Taglit Birthright groups at New York airport

While young people were getting ready for their flights to Israel, they were asked about their knowledge of certain issues and policies, with their answers recorded.

At New York’s John F. Kennedy Airport on Monday night, Birthright Fellow and student leader Ariel Tidhar reported that the American Jewish activist group IfNotNow waylaid their group, as well as four other Taglit Birthright groups trying to check into their flights to Israel.

IfNotNow attempts “to end American Jewish support for the occupation,” referring to lands administered by Israel after wars, including eastern Jerusalem.

Tidhar told JNS, “They set up a table with a sign and snacks, and then they were coming up to participants while we were standing in line. While they were talking to participants, they were video recording and transcribing the conversations, saying ‘you should learn the truth about the country you’re about to visit’ and that ‘Birthright goes against Jewish morals.’

“Even though the airport is a public place, it’s a total ambush on their end, coming with this sign that says Birthright on it and trying to hand out snacks,” maintained Tidhar. A poster from IfNotNow encouraging Birthright participants to ask about their trip. Credit: Ariel Tidhar.

According to the student leader, some of the Taglit Birthright participants were “asking them what are they trying to achieve from this,” while another defended the organization’s right to “share their side.”

“We have to figure it out more with our guide, but I think it’s fair to have an open and honest conversation about it,” said Tidhar. “I think it’s a huge problem in the states now.”

According to Yona Schiffmiller, Director of the North America Desk at NGO Monitor, which produces and distributes critical analysis and reports on the activities of the international and local NGO networks, “IfNotNow for the last couple of years has spent most of their energy on trying to disrupt the Jewish communal institutions, whether its by hosting protests or sit-ins inside of Jewish communal institutions.”

He told JNS, “They have a simplistic narrative that Israel is wholly responsible for anything bad that happens to the Palestinians, and [that] the American Jewish community is wholly responsible for everything bad that happens to the Palestinians through their support of Israel.”

Aviva Slomich, international campus director for CAMERA, a media watchdog group devoted to promoting accurate and balanced coverage of Israel and the Middle East, told JNS, “IfNotNow attacks Israel, making heavily biased statements and facts, distorting the truth and demonizing Israel and the Jewish people.”

But Schiffmiller maintained that the assault on Birthright speaks to a more fundamental problem than IfNotNow’s attempt to dismantle Jewish communal institutions.

“There is a basic mischaracterization about the embrace of Israel as a part of people’s Jewish identity,” he told JNS. “You can be highly critical of Israeli government policy, but that doesn’t mean you cannot embrace Israel as part of your identity—and that’s something that Birthright tries to engender.

“Getting involved in Birthright is very misguided by IfNotNow. It blurs the lines between the legitimate criticism of Israeli policy and trying to prevent people from having a strong pro-Israel identity as a part of who they are,” said Schiffmiller.

Neither the Birthright providers nor the Taglit Birthright umbrella organization chose to comment on the incident.

Summary of the Perasha Nathan Dweck

Parashat Balak is very unique in that it contains an event that no one from Benei Israel ever witnessed or knew about. If not for the Torah telling us about Balak and Bilam trying to destroy Benei Israel none of Benei Israel would ever have known about it. And this begs the question, why did the Torah dedicate an entire parasha to tell us about these events. I heard a nice idea that the message is to make us aware as to the extent of how much Hashem loves us and protects us. We generally only appreciate the events we witness Hashem saving us from, like when a person almost gets hit by a car. But we have to know that for every time Hashem protects us in a way that we see there are many more situations that Hashem protected us without us even knowing about it. For every suicide bomber that actually carries out an attack in Israel where several people somehow come out unharmed there are many other attempts that Hashem prevents from even being carried out. Hashem is constantly protecting us. Like we say in modim of the amida, “ve’al nifle’otecha ve’tobotech she’be’kol eht (and all the miracles and kindnesses that you do for us every second)”. Every second Hashem is protecting us from things that might occur to us. Hashem is constantly protecting us whether we know it or not! We just have to realize it. This is the message of Parashat Balak! And maybe this is why remembering the events of Balak and Bilam is one of the 10 items that we have a mitzvah to say and remember every single day. To remind ourselves on a daily basis of Hashem’s constant love and protection!

Balak - Bilam tries to curse Benei Israel (year 40 in the midbar)

1- Moab fears Benei Israel will attack them and hires Bilam to curse Benei Israel

2- Bilam refuses to come at first after Hashem tells him not to go. After asking a second time Hashem allows him to go if he will only speak the words Hashem tells him.

3- Hashem sends an angel to block Bilam's donkey's path on his way to go curse Benei Israel. Bilam fights with his donkey to continue on the path. Bilam finally reaches Balak.

- 4- Bilam attempts to curse Benei Israel and ends up blessing them
- 5- Bilam again tries to curse Benei Israel and ends up praising and blessing them
- 6- Bilam a 3rd time tries to curse Benei Israel and ends up praising and blessing them
- 7- Benei Israel falls prey to the Midyanite women and the avoda zara of baal peor. A plague ensues. Zimri brings a Midyanite woman in front of Moshe to sin with her. Pinchas heroically kills Zimri.

Balak – Thoughts on the Perasha by Rabbi Elie Abadie M.D.

A profound statement by our Sages says, "in the path that a person wishes to go, he is led". We know, however, that a person can have many evil plans to implement. Would Heaven help a person in implementing their evil plan? Or, does this statement only applies when a person has a good deed to fulfill?

In Talmud Tractate Makkot 10b:

אנוה בר רמא הל ירמאו אנוה בר רמא אנוה בר רב הבר רמא
פדאש ררדב סיבותכה נמו סיאיבנה נמו הרותה נמ רזעלא ר"א
ותוא ויכילומ הב רליל הצור

Apropos the path upon which God leads people, the Gemara cites a statement that Rabba bar Rav Huna says that Rav Huna says, and some say it was a statement that Rav Huna says that Rabbi Elazar says: From the Torah, from the Prophets, and from the Writings one learns that along the path a person wishes to proceed, one leads and assists him.

ביתנו מהמע רלת אל (ביבכ רבדמב) ביתכד הרותה נמ
סתא רל סוק (כיבכ רבדמב)

One learns this from the Torah, as it is written that initially God said to Bilaam with regard to the contingent dispatched by Balak: "You shall not go with them" (Number 22:12). After Bilaam implored the G-d and indicated his desire to go with them, it is written: "Arise, go with them" (Number 22:20).

Sometimes a person chooses a certain way of life and goes with it. Even though he has realizes that not only can he continue, but even has special success and thinks that this is the proof that G-d allows him to continue on the same path. G-d gives a person signs all his life, shows him all kinds of situations that will hopefully make the person change course, to see the truth. Sometimes, G-d brings people around the person to convince him otherwise. Sometimes it brings him

difficulties to wake the person up, and think what he is doing. Where should he go? But a person immersed in a lust for riches, respect, power etc. does not see clearly. A person does not care about anything; he would do anything to reach his goal. And then Hashem gives him the opportunity to continue with his own, because that is the way he chose – and person has a choice, and the possibility of choosing good or bad. This, however, is not because G-d agrees with him, but because the path a person wants to walk in, he is lead.

The Creator gives a person the possibility of always returning and doing the right thing. G-d's patience is always extended to everyone. G-d gave us the good and the bad. We just have to choose. When a person wants to go the wrong way, and sees that he is succeeding, he thinks that by succeeding, it means that it is a good way. A person thinks that G-d leads him and helps him; and does not understand, that it is only from the freedom of choice that G-d has endowed us with. G-d gives a person the opportunity to choose good or evil; not because He agrees with him.

And that's what we learn from Bilaam – that even G-d did not want him to go. Only, since he wanted to go, G-d allowed him to go and said to him – go with them, because a person has the option of choosing the right path, or the wrong path.

The evil Bilaam did not care; he followed his lusts. He was blinded from the right path. He could not see what even his donkey was able to see.

If we keep our paths in the right direction, and try to follow the path of goodness, the path Torah and missvot, Hashem will show us and lead the way.

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

"How goodly are your tents, Ya'akov, your dwelling places, Yisrael." (Bemidbar 24:5)

In his third and final attempt to curse the Jewish People, Bilaam sought to place ayin hara, an evil eye, on them. However, looking at the nation from a nearby mountain, he saw that the entrance of each of their tents faced a different direction, so that no one could gaze into the tent of his neighbor. Because of this level of modesty among the Jewish People, Bilaam received Divine inspiration to bless them instead of cursing them.

On this, we can ask two simple questions. Why did Bilaam specifically attempt to place ayin hara on the Jewish People now, and how did the

modesty of the Jewish People prevent him from succeeding?

The Taz answers that until the Jewish People sinned with the Golden Calf, no nation was able to see them, because they were completely covered by the Clouds of Glory, as they traveled through the desert. However, following their sin, the Clouds of Glory were removed from them and for the first time, the Jewish People were exposed to the eyes of the other nations.

Therefore, since Bilaam saw that they were no longer concealed, he decided that the time was right to place an ayin hara on them, which specifically rests on things which are not hidden (Berachot 20a).

However, the reason why his ayin hara did not work on the Jewish People was because of their modesty, which, by its very nature, involves keeping something concealed. So, when Bilaam saw that the Jewish People, despite losing the Clouds of Glory, were still very much concealed, due to their extreme modesty, he was unable to cast upon them any ayin hara. Rabbi Reuven Semah

This week we read about the repeated attempts of Balak and Bil'am to curse the Jewish nation. Each time, Hashem prevents Bil'am from uttering his curses, and causes him to bless the nation instead. It's interesting to note that throughout this entire episode, we see no mention of what the Jewish nation was doing. Presumably they were going about their daily lives, learning Torah from Moshe Rabenu, totally oblivious to all the events that are taking place. Only later on did they find out about the great danger they were in, and how Hashem saved them.

A story is told about a Rabbi, who had a gentile neighbor who hated Jews. The neighbor decided that he wanted to ambush the Rabbi and severely beat him, so he studied the Rabbi's habits and discovered that he always walks home from shul at night after prayers, and passes by a certain tree at 10:02 pm. One dark, cloudy night, he hid behind the tree holding a big club, and waited for the Rabbi to pass. However, that night after arbit, someone approached the Rabbi and asked him a question, and the conversation went on for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, a big, burly soldier of the king happened to be walking by the tree at exactly 10:02. The neighbor jumped out and whacked the soldier with the stick. The soldier quickly recovered from the attack, subdued the attacker, tied him up and hauled him off to prison. A few minutes later, the Rabbi walked by like he always does, clueless to what had just occurred.

We say in Hallel, "All the nations shall praise Hashem, because Hashem has overwhelmed us with His kindness." Why would the other nations be

praising Hashem for His kindness to us? Because only they know how many times they have plotted against us and tried to harm us, only to have Hashem prevent them from succeeding. We are going about our daily lives and Hashem is constantly saving us, and we don't even know it!

We say three times a day in Modim in the Amidah, "We thank You...for Your miracles that are with us every day." We should have in mind not only the miracles that we know about, but also the many miracles that He is doing for us that we aren't even aware of. May He always continue to protect us and watch over us as a loving Father does for His children, and keep us all safe and sound. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

The Humble Pit

"The hardened case of a peach pit is too strong for the powerful teeth of animals to crack and yet when we put it into soil it opens automatically. It is clearly designed to protect the seed for the future, so that there will be more trees."

To become a tree, even a pit from a piece of fruit must humble itself into the soil. We can learn from a pit to humble ourselves before Hashem and others. Gravitate to humble people, willing to admit fault and accept Hashem's Divine Providence. (Norman D. Levy, Based on Rabbi Miller's Duties of the mind)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

The Miracles We Don't See

The story told in Parashat Balak is truly extraordinary. Balak, the king of Moab, teamed up with the gentile prophet Bilam to try to annihilate the Jewish people by way of a curse. Bilam knew the precise moment when G-d is angry, and he sought to capitalize on this knowledge by cursing Beneh Yisrael just at that moment, which would have the effect of utter annihilation. G-d, however, in His infinite mercy, altered the usual mechanisms of the spiritual world during that time in order to foil Bilam's efforts.

What makes this story extraordinary is not the fact that the existence of the Jewish people was in danger. This has happened on numerous occasions throughout our history, and in every case, as in the times of Balak and Bilam, G-d has stepped in to rescue us. But what is unique about the story of Balak is the fact that not one member of Beneh Yisrael knew about the danger that loomed. The entire story takes place in Moab, where Balak and Bilam went to different locations overlooking the Israelite camp

in an attempt to place the curse. Throughout this period, Beneh Yisrael went about their usual business, eating the manna, praying, studying Torah from Moshe, and so on. Nobody had any idea that the nation's very survival was in question. When Amalek attacked Beneh Yisrael, the people were there on the battlefield fighting. When different nations threatened the Jewish people in Eretz Yisrael, they were keenly aware of the situation. But here, the threat was initiated and ended far from the people's view, and they knew nothing about it until G-d had Moshe record the story in the Torah.

Why, then, is this episode told in the Torah? Why does it matter to do us that far away there were two evil men who plotted against us and were unsuccessful?

The answer is provided by the prophet Micha, in the section chosen as the Haftara for Shabbat Parashat Balak. The prophet admonishes the people to remember Balak's scheme and how Hashem stepped in to foil it, "Lema'an Da'at Sidkot Hashem"—"In order that you know the kindnesses of Hashem." We need to know this story so that we can at least begin to understand the extent of G-d's love and care for us. We need to know that Hashem protects us from dangers of which we never become aware. There are many times in our lives when we can see how Hashem stepped in to help us and take care of us, but we must also recognize that for every such instance, there are countless other times when Hashem protects or helps us without our ever knowing it. We cannot even begin to imagine the number of bacteria and viruses present in the air from which G-d protects us. We have no idea of the criminals and anti-Semites who unsuccessfully conspire against us, without even getting far enough to have the incident reported in the news. And we have no idea of how many terrorists in Israel and throughout the world have their efforts thwarted without anybody knowing.

The Pasuk in Tehillim describes Hashem as "Oseh Nifla'ot Gedolot Le'bado"—"He performs great wonders by Himself." Clearly, we do not need a verse in the Tanach to tell us that G-d makes miracles "by Himself," without anybody's help. This is self-evident. What this verse is saying, as the Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839) explains, is that G-d often performs miracles alone, without anyone else ever knowing about it. The story of Balak and Bilaam was revealed in order for us to

recognize that so often miracles occur on our behalf far away, unbeknownst to us, "Le'bado"—when He is "all alone," as it were.

This Parasha thus serves to remind us of "Sidkot Hashem," that Hashem's kindness towards us extends far beyond what we can ever see or know. We do not even know all the kindnesses He performs for us, or the extent of the protection He provides for us. And recognizing the limits of this knowledge should lead us to greater appreciation of Hashem's kindness and a renewed sense of commitment to obey His will.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Yosef Farhi IN A DRONE'S EYE VIEW

We read in the Haftarah this week. עמי זכר-נא מה-יעץ בלק מלך מואב ומה-ענה אתו בלעם בן-בעור מן-השטים עד-הגלגל למען דעת צדקות יקוק My nation, please remember what Balak, King of Moab advised, and what Bilaam, son of Beor, answered him from the Shittim until the Gilgal, in order to know the Righteousness of G-d. (Micha 6) Our Rabbis learn that Bilaam had a most powerful weapon: the knowledge of the arrival of the split moment when G-d "fumes", each day. If Bilaam would have leveled his accusations against the Jews at that split moment, there would have been very serious ramifications to his claims. But G-d tells us that He did not fume all those days that Bilaam tried to present a case against the Jews (Berachot 7a). And G-d asks us never to forget this.

The Chida adds this "remembrance" to the remembrances that we recite each day, mentioned in the Siddur after Shacharit. "And I am fulfilling the Mitzvah, to remember that Hashem saved our fathers from Balak and Bilaam." (Kaf Ahat 25 9).

The Zohar says something so powerful regarding this. The reason why G-d does not listen to us, when we beg Him to remember the good we used to have in the times of the Bet HaMikdash ר יקוק מה-היה לנו (Eicha 5), and the reason that He does not listen to us when we cry out to Him to remember the brutal destructions of the Temples, זכר יקוק לבני אדם את-יום (Tehillim 137) is because G-d is asking us, begging us, that WE first remember how G-d did not let Bilaam curse the

Jewish Nation behind their backs! (Zohar, Behukotay 112)

Why is it so important to remember something that we were not even witness to?! The Exodus, the splitting of the sea, Har Sinai, the Mannah, the Well of Miriam, the Clouds of Glory, the war with Amalek and the other miraculous wars - those were all known to the people. They saw it, they lived it, and they could remember it and pass it on to their descendants. But we know of the episode with Bilaam, only because G-d told it to Moshe! Of all things, why was it so important to remember G-d's having prevented the curse? And why is it that if we do not remember His prevention of that curse, G-d doesn't want to remember the good times of the relationship between Him and His People, and the brutal destructions?

The answer is that the Jews knew nothing about this whole episode of Bilaam's attempt to curse the Jews. It all was completely "behind their backs", and nonetheless, G-d saved them. Without even a single Jewish prayer, a single Jewish tear! G-d had no problem saving us - even though we had no idea that we were in such hot water - because G-d loves us more than we realize!

The lesson that G-d watches over us even when we are not watching over ourselves is such an important lesson to keep in mind and remember. It is so important, that our Rabbis wanted to incorporate it into the recitation of the Shema - Bilaam's words describing our Nation **קָרַע שִׁכְבּוֹ כְּאַרְיֵי וּכְלָבִיא מִי יִקְיָמוּ**. He crouches, and lies like a lion, and like a lion, who can make him rise? (Berachot 12b) Bilaam compared the way the Jews go to sleep and how they rise to the way lions go to sleep and awaken. When we go to sleep, we are not afraid, because we know that G-d takes care of the things that we cannot take care of.

This is what happened with the city of Cheshbon. Cheshbon was a metropolis on the border of E Yisrael and in a strategic location. Cheshbon belonged to Moab and it was impossible to conquer. Sihon, king of Emori, hired Bilaam to curse the first Moabite King who ruled over the mighty Cheshbon city. Bilaam's curse was so strong that Sihon was able to conquer Moab and take the city of Cheshbon for his possession. Imagine Sihon's feeling of success!!! But G-d let all of this happen, because He wanted the Jews to be able to capture and take possession of Cheshbon. G-d did not let the Jews fight Moab. So, as long as Cheshbon was in the hands of Moab, the Jews could not fight for it. But

now that Cheshbon was owned by Sihon and the Emori, the Jews were allowed to capture it!

Who would ever think of thanking G-d for letting Sihon take Cheshbon from Moab?! But, that is precisely what was needed for the Jewish People to be able to capture Cheshbon. G-d pulled the strings behind the scenes in a way that had long-term ramifications. And He always does.

We thank HaShem only for "good" that we can perceive with our senses. Something we feel, see, taste or smell. But what about the good things that "happen", the good things that Hashem does for us that we do not even know about? How many times has G-d twisted reality behind the scenes to serve your needs, changing the outcome for the better, and you had no inkling that He was changing the script?

Life is filled with the greatest irony. Things that we fear most in life turn out to be not as bad or scary as we assumed, while things to which we paid only a minimum of attention, such as health issues, interpersonal relationships or stress levels actually present the biggest problems that we have to deal with. I asked my friends who are 65 years old or more what they had to say about this irony in life, and they all told me that it is so true. The things that hit us the hardest are the things that we least expected. So many times in life, we find ourselves in a rut over things that are, in fact, completely out of our control. Just when we thought we had things under control...

We would do much better if we were to perceive our reality with a drone's eye view, and accept the fact that that there are many things over which we have no control that we are not even aware of. And still, everything is fine. Because even though we are not in control, G-d is always in control. And this is something that G-d begs us to remember.

If only we lived this way, G-d would remember the good Temple days, and G-d would remember all the suffering of our Nation in the days of the destruction of our Temples.

This one thought, that G-d takes care of the things that we are not even aware of, can be the most powerful thought we have as a Nation. It might even bring the Moshiach

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks
A People that Dwells Alone

This is an extraordinary moment in Jewish history, for good and not-so-good reasons. For the first time in almost 4,000 years we have simultaneously sovereignty and independence in the land and state of Israel, and freedom and equality in the Diaspora. There have been times – all too brief – when Jews had one or the other, but never before, both at the same time. That is the good news.

The less-good news, though, is that Anti-Semitism has returned within living memory of the Holocaust. The State of Israel remains isolated in the international political arena. It is still surrounded by enemies. And it is the only nation among the 193 making up the United Nations whose very right to exist is constantly challenged and always under threat.

Given all this, it seems the right time to re-examine words appearing in this week's parsha, uttered by the pagan prophet Balaam, that have come to seem to many, the most powerful summation of Jewish history and destiny:

From the peaks of rocks I see them,
From the heights I gaze upon them.
This is a people who dwell alone,
Not reckoning themselves one of the nations. (Num. 23:9)

For two leading Israeli diplomats in the twentieth century – Yaacov Herzog and Naphtali Lau-Lavie – this verse epitomised their sense of Jewish peoplehood after the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. Herzog, son of a Chief Rabbi of Israel and brother of Chaim who became Israel's president, was Director-General of the Prime Minister's office from 1965 to his death in 1972. Naphtali Lavie, a survivor of Auschwitz who became Israel's Consul-General in New York, lived to see his brother, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, become Israel's Chief Rabbi. Herzog's collected essays were published under the title, drawn from Balaam's words, *A People that Dwells Alone*. Lavie's were entitled *Balaam's Prophecy* – again a reference to this verse.[1]

For both, the verse expressed the uniqueness of the Jewish people – its isolation on the one hand, its defiance and resilience on the other. Though it has faced opposition and persecution from some of the greatest superpowers the world has ever known, it has outlived them all.

Given, though, the return of Anti-Semitism, it is worth reflecting on one particular interpretation of the verse, given by the Dean of Volozhyn Yeshiva, R. Naftali Zvi

Yehudah Berlin (Netziv, Russia, 1816-1893). Netziv interpreted the verse as follows: for every other nation, when its people went into exile and assimilated into the dominant culture, they found acceptance and respect. With Jews, the opposite was the case. In exile, when they remained true to their faith and way of life, they found themselves able to live at peace with their gentile neighbours. When they tried to assimilate, they found themselves despised and reviled.

The sentence, says Netziv, should therefore be read thus: "If it is a people content to be alone, faithful to its distinctive identity, then it will be able to dwell in peace. But if Jews seek to be like the nations, the nations will not consider them worthy of respect." [2]

This is a highly significant statement, given the time and place in which it was made, namely Russia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At that time, many Russian Jews had assimilated, some converting to Christianity. But Anti-Semitism did not diminish. It grew, exploding into violence in the pogroms that happened in more than a hundred towns in 1881. These were followed by the notorious Anti-Semitic May Laws of 1882. Realising that they were in danger if they stayed, between 3 and 5 million Jews fled to the West.

It was at this time that Leon Pinsker, a Jewish physician who had believed that the spread of humanism and enlightenment would put an end to Anti-Semitism, experienced a major change of heart and wrote one of the early texts of secular Zionism, *Auto-Emancipation* (1882). In words strikingly similar to those of Netziv, he said, "In seeking to fuse with other peoples [Jews] deliberately renounced to some extent their own nationality. Yet nowhere did they succeed in obtaining from their fellow-citizens recognition as natives of equal status." They tried to be like everyone else, but this only left them more isolated.

Something similar happened in Western Europe also. Far from ending hostility to Jews, Enlightenment and Emancipation merely caused it to mutate, from religious Judeophobia to racial Anti-Semitism. No-one spoke of this more poignantly than Theodore Herzl in *The Jewish State* (1896):

We have honestly endeavoured everywhere to merge ourselves in the social life of surrounding communities and to preserve the faith of our fathers. We are not permitted to do so. In vain are we loyal patriots, our loyalty in some places running to extremes; in vain do we make the same sacrifices of life and property as our fellow-citizens; in vain do we

strive to increase the fame of our native land in science and art, or her wealth by trade and commerce. In countries where we have lived for centuries we are still cried down as strangers ... If we could only be left in peace ... But I think we shall not be left in peace.

The more we succeeded in being like everyone else, implied Herzl, the more we were disliked by everyone else. Consciously or otherwise, these nineteenth century voices were echoing a sentiment first articulated 26 centuries ago by the prophet Ezekiel, speaking in the name of God to the would-be assimilationists among the Jewish exiles in Babylon:

You say, "We want to be like the nations, like the peoples of the world, who serve wood and stone." But what you have in mind will never happen. (Ez. 20:32)

Anti-Semitism is one of the most complex phenomena in the history of hate, and it is not my intention here to simplify it. But there is something of lasting significance in this convergence of views between Netziv, one of the greatest rabbinic scholars of his day, and the two great secular Zionists, Pinsker and Herzl, though they differed on so much else. Assimilation is no cure for Anti-Semitism. If people do not like you for what you are, they will not like you more for pretending to be what you are not.

Jews cannot cure Anti-Semitism. Only Anti-Semites can do that, together with the society to which they belong. The reason is that Jews are not the cause of Anti-Semitism. They are the objects of it, but that is something different. The cause of Anti-Semitism is a profound malaise in the cultures in which it appears. It happens whenever a society feels that something is badly amiss, when there is a profound cognitive dissonance between the way things are and the way people think they ought to be. People are then faced with two possibilities. They can either ask, "What did we do wrong?" and start to put it right, or they can ask, "Who did this to us?" and search for a scapegoat.

In century after century Jews have been made the scapegoat for events that had nothing to do with them, from medieval plagues to poisoned wells to inner tensions in Christianity to Germany's defeat in the First World War to the underachievement of many Muslim states today. Anti-Semitism is a sickness, and it cannot be cured by Jews. It is also evil, and those who tolerate it when they could have protested are accomplices to evil.

We have nothing to apologise for in our insistence on being different. Judaism began as a protest against empires, symbolised by Babel in Genesis and ancient Egypt in Exodus. These were the first great empires, and they achieved the freedom of the few at the cost of the enslavement of the many.

Jews have always been the irritant of empires because of our insistence on the dignity of the individual and his or her liberty. Anti-Semitism is either the last gasp of a declining culture or the first warning sign of a new totalitarianism. God commanded our ancestors to be different, not because they were better than others – "It is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land" (Deut. 9:6) – but because by being different we teach the world the dignity of difference. Empires seek to impose unity on a plural world. Jews know that unity exists in heaven; God creates diversity on earth.

There is one fundamental difference between Anti-Semitism today and its precursors in the past. Today we have a State of Israel. We need no longer fear what Jews discovered after the Evian Conference in 1938, when the nations of the world closed their doors and Jews knew that they had not one square inch on earth they could call home in the Robert Frost sense, namely the place where "when you have to go there, they have to let you in."^[3] Today we have a home – and every assault on Jews and Israel today only serves to make Jews and Israel stronger. That is why Anti-Semitism is not only evil but also self-destructive. Hate destroys the hater. Nothing has ever been gained by making Jews, or anyone else, the scapegoat for your sins.

None of this is to diminish the seriousness with which we must join with others to fight Anti-Semitism and every other religious or racial hate. But let the words of Netziv stay with us. We should never abandon our distinctiveness. It is what makes us who we are. Nor is there any contradiction between this and the universalism of the prophets. To the contrary – and this is the life changing idea: In our uniqueness lies our universality. By being what only we are, we contribute to humanity what only we can give.

Rav Kook on the Perasha Tents and Dwelling Places

The evil prophet Balaam wanted to curse the people of Israel, but instead found himself blessing them, "How goodly are your tents, Jacob; your dwelling places, Israel" (Num. 24:5).

Is the repetition in Balaam's blessing only poetic? Or is there a deeper significance to these two forms of shelter, the ohel (tent) and the mishkan (dwelling place)?

The Journey of the Soul: As we strive to grow spiritually, we make use of two contradictory yet complementary methods. The first method is our aspiration to constantly improve ourselves. We strive to attain greater wisdom and enlightenment. We seek to continually refine the emotions and ennoble the spirit.

The second method is the necessity to restrain our striving for spiritual growth, in order to assimilate changes and guard against spiritual lapses. We want to internalize our spiritual and ethical gains, and maintain our current level. This means that we must curb the desire for growth, so that our ambitions do not overextend the soul's natural capacity for change.

The tent and the mishkan are both forms of temporary shelter. Both relate to the soul's upwards journey. However, they differ in a significant aspect. The tent is inherently connected to the state of traveling. It corresponds to the aspiration for constant change and growth. The mishkan is also part of the journey, but it is associated with the rests between travels. It is the soul's sense of calm, its rest from the constant movement, for the sake of the overall mission.

Surprisingly, it is the second method that is the loftier of the two. The desire to change reflects a lower-level fear, lest we stagnate and deteriorate. Therefore, the blessing mentions tents first, together with the name Jacob, the first and embryonic name of the Jewish people. The need to stop and rest, on the other hand, stems from a higher-level fear, lest we over-shoot the appropriate level for the soul. For this reason, the blessing mentions "mishkan" together with the name Israel, Jacob's second and holier name.

In any case, both aspects are required in order to achieve stable spiritual growth. Balaam's prophetic blessing praises the balanced union of "How goodly are your tents, Jacob," the soul's longing for change, together with the more restful state of "your dwelling places, Israel," restricting growth in order to avoid unchecked advancement, thus enabling the soul to properly absorb all spiritual attainments.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 269-270; adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 42-43)

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"Let me die the death of the righteous and let my afterward be like his" (23:10)

Here Bileam envies the reward of the Afterlife which is promised to Israel, and he expresses the wish that he could be worthy to share their lot. It is noteworthy that this open declaration of the reward of the Afterlife was made by a non-Israelite prophet. Although the Afterlife is hinted elsewhere, yet no Israelite prophet spoke openly on this matter; and it was left to Bileam to proclaim publicly the reason why Hashem numbers Israel.

The Rambam says "sadeekim yoshvim", the sadeekim sit forever in Olam Haba. They never get tired of it.

Every minute the simha in Olam Haba gets bigger and bigger. And "their crowns are on their heads." What are those crowns? The Rambam says they are the da'at Hashem, the understanding of true knowledge that you gain in this world. You have to know that Hakadosh Baruch Hu is the Bore' (Creator); He is the Mehave', the One who brings everything into existence. The whole world was made bidvar Hashem, with His word, and not only did He make it, He maintains it all the time.

All of these things are part of the crown of true understanding/da'at. The love of Hashem, going in His ways, and other things that make the crown on your head. The Rambam explained that in Olam Haba the sadeekim have pleasure in proportion to the kind of crown they have acquired in this life. The reward in Olam Haba is measured by how much knowledge of Hashem you gain (de'ah). Misvot are very good, but if you want to get more reward, do Misvot with De'ah, and De'ah is something you have to work on.

That is why Talmud Torah is so important. You have to learn Hashkafa (Torah outlook) and Emunah and all the topics dealt with in the Hovot Halevavot (Duties of the Mind), in order to recognize Hashem's Hesed and Wisdom in the world. "Gudlo v'tubo male' olam", His kindness and greatness and wisdom fill the world (Shabbat prayers). Adapted from "Journey Into Greatness" "Rabbi Miller Speaks Vol. 1"